



hen many telecommunicators began their careers years ago, they were greeted by a seasoned dispatcher who introduced them to their new working environment by pointing to a seat and barking, “Wait there.” The rookie telecommunicator’s mind was likely filled with visions of sitting in a room, chock full of technology and action, learning the job and then getting the opportunity to use newly acquired skills on the phone and radio. Instead, they were assigned a “trainer” who was most likely engaged in the multitasking typical of public safety communications, and the new employee was No. 8 on their task list. Weeks of ever-building anticipation of the telecommunicator’s first day on the job culminated in a sharp pinprick of stark reality. The classroom training had begun; yep, no classroom, just “wait there.” It was the first pre-arrival instruction many telecommunicators would hear from their trainer—and quite the first impression.

In time, the trainer would offer the next instruction: “Don’t touch anything.” Eventually, the telecommunicator would be “shown the ropes,” tried out on the phones and radios, and maybe yelled at a time or two for mistakes. After about a week, the telecommunicator would be assigned to the midnight shift, possibly by themselves. CAD was not yet born, and the closest thing to it

comm center until we could prove proficiency in the classroom and simulations, evidenced by written and practical tests. After passing the exams, we were assigned to a seasoned dispatcher who volunteered to coach a trainee for a number of weeks, evaluating our performance.

My training experience left a positive impression on me that has firmly rooted the training philosophies I adhere to today. I will always remember my roots, and I still wholeheartedly thank my mentor, Mark Ford from Chester County (Pa.) Department of Emergency Services. He left a positive impression on a zealous young trainee that has lasted decades. My training program has benefited because of his professionalism and drive as a training professional. What kind of impression are we leaving with our trainees and dispatchers?

Our profession demands people who are invested in—and committed to—the training process. It requires someone on the front lines who can escort new employees into the emergency communications profession. Today, this person is the vital link in your training program; this person is your communications training officer (CTO).

CTO programs are an outgrowth from the various emergency services disciplines that utilized field training officer (FTO) programs to orient new police officers,



GET YOUR COMMUNICATIONS TRAINING OFFICER THE TRAINING VITAL TO SUCCESS FOR ALL YOUR TELECOMMUNICATORS

BY STEPHEN H. REICHMAN SR.

was the handwritten “card-aided dispatch” format with time-stamping clocks that would jam at least once per shift.

Ahhh, those were the days.

PERSONALLY SPEAKING

I’m thankful to say my personal experience was much better than that described above. The agency where I began my career provided me a basic-level classroom experience followed by simulation training. We were not permitted to even see the

firefighters and paramedics to the practical aspects of the job in the field. CTO programs also evolved out of the comm center on-the-job-training (OJT) programs that have been with us in one form or another since the beginning.

Someone along the path of learning the job needs to show the new hire how to do the job correctly. The individual or coach who performs this service will set the stage for success or failure of said new hire. The critical positioning of the

coach—a seasoned employee who can “show them the ropes”—and the need to effectively train newcomers, makes the role of the CTO a vital link in the training program chain.

CTO PROGRAMS ARE A MUST

Having a CTO program is no longer just an enhancement to your agency’s training program. A properly designed CTO program is necessary to ensure your trainees are receiving the proper type and quantity of training. The CTO links the management aspects of training with your line personnel and trainees. They work with trainees who are handling live calls and need to understand how to sit on their hands as well as how to foresee problems and intervene accordingly. The CTO must also maintain a positive training environment. Your CTOs will leave an impression upon both new employees and seasoned dispatchers by how well they deliver training information, mentor, coach, and respond to questions and trainee mistakes. Having such a program increases your liability protection because you’re ensuring that your training program meets an established standard that can be defended in court.

TRAINING THE CTO

For years, APCO has been providing comm centers all over the U.S. and Canada with CTO training programs. APCO also led the charge to set minimum standards for CTOs through American National Standards Institute (ANSI) with the Sept. 19, 2007, approval of ANS 3.101.1-2007: “Minimum Training Standards for Public Safety Communications Training Officer (CTO).” This standard continues to solidify and further specialize the emergency communications profession, and it sets the bar for agencies to shoot for in their service levels. (See p. 37 for ANSI CTO Standard information.)

It may look like quite the challenge to develop a CTO program, but you don’t have to reinvent the wheel to accomplish it. You can use the APCO CTO training program and the supporting ANSI standard to develop a program that will fit your needs. To do so, you’ll need to consider a few important factors.

1. Obtain approval for your CTO program: Good preparation will allow you to answer any questions your agency may have.

A key element in any CTO program is getting the support from the higher ups. If your agency head or director supports the CTO program, the policies you develop and the training you provide will have some teeth behind them. Having this support means that your director supports and authorizes the training philosophy used in the CTO program. Don’t assume your agency director understands CTO programs like you do. You’ll have to do the legwork ahead of time and sketch out a vision with the supporting plan to present to your boss.

Anticipate any questions he or she may have by developing an FAQ on the program. It may require you to call agencies in your area or those in another region to understand what questions can be asked. Talk to your supervisors and ask them what issues could arise involving the CTO program. Record the questions and answers. Although you may not have all the answers, you should have some to demonstrate that you put thought into how this program could affect your agency. Remember to not just identify problems to your boss, but to also offer solutions.

Examples of questions that might arise—and possible answers:

- What is the purpose of this program and the direct benefits to this agency? *The purpose of a CTO program is to provide consistent, comprehensive and court-defensible training to agency personnel.*
- What national standards are currently supported for CTO programs? *To my knowledge there was no standard until APCO released the Minimum Training Standards for Public Safety Communications Training Officer APCO ANS 3.101.1-2007.*
- How will CTO training affect staffing in the comm center? *It will enhance retention and intrinsic motivation, and provide a standardized check and balance for the agency.*
- Can it be done without incurring overtime? *If staffing is sufficient to pull people off the floor to train them as CTOs, no overtime would be needed. If a person takes the online class while working, no overtime would be needed. If a CTO is training a new-hire, no overtime should be needed.*

- What union or contract issues will you need to consider? *Some agency contracts may require incentive pay for those who perform additional duties. CTO would be an additional duty to that of telecommunicator. It might even be considered a promotion, depending on the agency.*
- Can it be taught in house? If not, what will the CTO program cost in time, travel and materials? *Yes, APCO Institute’s CTO course can be taught in house by an agency instructor who holds a current APCO Institute CTO Instructor Certification. The cost per student with an agency instructor is \$69, which includes the text, test and certification.*
- Can our CTO students go through the CTO course on-console during slow call-traffic periods via APCO Institute Online? *Most definitely; the CTO course can be taken online, and much of the work can be done on shift. It all depends on the capabilities of the comm center, staffing and activity levels.*
- How we will select our CTO students (minimum requirements)? *This is an agency decision. An application and interview process is recommended to select the best candidates for the position. Remember, the best candidates may not be the ones who have been there the longest or who perform their positions the best. The best candidates are those who can impart information and motivation to the trainees.*
- How we will document the processes? *Documentation methods are addressed in the CTO training course.*
- How does the CTO rate the trainee? *This is also addressed in the training course. The DOR, or Daily Observational Report, is the primary means to document trainee progress. It’s important to make sure everything is in concert: job description, tasks performed, policy and procedure all need to be in line with the standard evaluation guidelines in order to make sure performance is documented accurately.*

Some questions will revolve around CTO selection and training; others around the trainee, documentation, retention and

termination issues, modifications to current policies, schedule and overtime issues.

The more you prepare and paint the picture for your agency director, the higher the probability of acceptance of the program.

2. Develop your CTO program. Developing a CTO program is not as difficult as it was in years past. There is now abundant information available for you to customize your agency-specific CTO program.

Meeting the standard: The aforementioned ANSI CTO standard is a great place to begin developing your program. It's a minimum standard for you to achieve, and it's attainable no matter the agency size. Using this standard ensures that what you're doing is being done nationwide, which means you're providing an adequate service level.

Review each ANSI element, and ensure your agency's program meets the stated requirement:

Example: 2007 ANSI CTO Standard, Section 3.1 General (Page 11 of 16). "3.1.4: The CTO shall be aware of and understand the opportunity of all employees to participate in such programs as listed below, demonstrating the ability to inform Trainees of these services and make referrals as necessary:

1. Employee Assistance Program (EAP);
2. Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)/Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD);
3. Health and wellness programs;
4. Stress-management techniques."

Your agency may or may not have specific procedures on the items listed above, so ask the question: "Do we have and how do we access our EAP?" Once you determine the process and put it in writing, it becomes a part of your CTO training and evaluation program. Don't make these ANSI standard elements too difficult. The ANSI CTO standard primarily deals with policy, procedure and properly disseminating information to trainees. It has little to do with specialized equipment.

Define your minimum requirements and the selection of CTO candidates. Who do you want conducting your on-console training? You want your best CTOs to conduct the training, and you'll have to carefully select these individuals to fill this need. Seniority alone does not qualify someone to be a CTO. You should consider



APCO CTO Training Resources

APCO Institute Online

- CTO: www.apcointl.com/institute/courses/cto.htm
- CTO Instructor: www.apcointl.com/institute/courses/ctoi.htm
- APCO Communications Training Officer Course Student Manual, Edition 4 (\$69)
- APCO/AST—Expectations Evaluation Suite/CTO Software: www.astcorp.com/expectations

CTO Training Vendors

- First Contact 9-1-1: www.firstcontact911.com/cto.htm
- National Emergency Communications Institute: www.neci911.com/2008_Agency_CTO.html
- Public Safety Consultants: www.e911training.com/training_operator.htm
- Public Safety Group: www.publicsafetygroup.com/pages/05.html#Anchor-Communications-49575
- Public Safety Training Consultants: www.pstc911.com/classes/description/ctoworkshop.html

a range of criteria. The bottom line is that these people should be positive role models, good at working with new employees as well as existing employees, and familiar with the variety of learning styles out there. CTOs need to be patient but firm and have the ability to balance constructive criticism with encouragement. They don't have to be perfect, just good at being a CTO.

Some such individuals stand out; you'll have to go hunting for others like diamonds in the rough. The selection process is important because those selected are individuals that trainees will emulate. CTOs might also qualify to be your next group of supervisors.

The ANSI CTO standard does not specify an amount of time or years of experience necessary to become a CTO, but it does specify that the CTO candidate (i.e., the dispatcher interested in receiving CTO training) should meet certain knowledge, skill and ability requirements. Some of the best CTOs have been the one- or two-year veterans who naturally took to this profession and have maintained a positive work experience profile. Others include the seasoned and consistently performing veteran of many years.

Examples of ability requirements include the ability to operate as a public safety telecommunicator with knowledge of the public safety communications system, resources, policies and capabilities. Also necessary are interpersonal communications skills,

instructional skills, the ability to present information to trainees and an understanding of the adult learning processes.

In a perfect world, this list would be attained with no problem. In the real world, it will be your job to design your minimum requirements so that your CTO applicants can come as close as possible. Each CTO candidate will have strengths and weaknesses that fill in many of these requirements, and when they begin to operate as a CTO, many of the remaining gaps will close with experience.

Define any additional minimums you want to see in your CTO cadre. Attendance and punctuality, use of sick leave, general overall demeanor and professionalism, disciplinary status (they should have none on file), participation and volunteering for "other related duties" are all examples of additional issues to consider when selecting CTOs.

Facilitating the training of your CTOs. Remember the logistics. If you're an agency that can train only one CTO at a time, then do just that. Sure, it will be an interesting class (your CTO instructor and the CTO student), but that's the best instructor-to-student ratio ever, so take advantage of it. The CTO student will also have some great ideas, so listen with both ears.

Facilitating the training will involve selecting a course, ordering materials, choosing a location and scheduling the dates and times.

Scheduling the CTO training can be a

LEARNING THE ROPES

challenge, especially with different day and shift rotations of your personnel. The APCO CTO training course is a 24-hour (three eight-hour days) format. Many conduct the training within three consecutive days. It may not be possible to use this format. Make the CTO training fit your schedule.

What we do at my agency is stretch the CTO training over a three-week period. This accommodates staffing levels in the comm center (no interruptions to the schedule) and provides the CTO students with an overtime pay opportunity by using one day off each week for three weeks to complete the class. Interestingly, course continuity does not suffer because the CTO student has time to ruminate on the information between classes. I have found that student interaction is also increased and the answers and discussion are more thought out. I can typically run two concurrent CTO classes within a month.

Using the ANSI CTO standard to develop your program and considering such logistics as training schedules are examples of factors you'll need to take into account. Scheduling is also a primary concern for your director, who will need to be able to see how it will affect staffing levels.

Define the roles and regulations you want CTOs to follow. Whether you use the APCO program for your training or not, you'll need to define the specific roles the CTO will play at your agency. What are your policy and practical expectations for these new trainers? Where does their authority begin and end? How will you evaluate and document the effectiveness of your CTOs? Define the boundaries that will best fit your agency needs.

You may have additional logistical considerations; the previous are examples to help you begin to think about them.

At this point you'll combine all of your data and put it into a presentation form appropriate for your agency director. You won't need to teach the whole course for them, but make sure you cover the key points your director will need when deciding whether to authorize your CTO program.

3. Conduct your CTO training. Once your CTO program is authorized, you'll need to obtain all of your resources and prepare to schedule classes. Prior to the training sessions, take time to go through your instructor and student manuals to become an expert on where the information is. Look over the written test. Get to

know the materials so well you can answer most questions on the spot.

I've taken the instructor pages out of the APCO binder and placed them in a larger three-ring binder. I then added specific section notes pages and printed resource information from the Internet. This keeps all of my resources in one binder.

When you teach your course, relax and have fun providing the information to your students. Make sure you include all of the information required for successful completion of the test, but don't forget the important locally applicable information, such as documentation requirements and any SOPs that are affected by the CTO program. I like to add some interactive time, especially having the CTO students teach mini modules to the class, developing their own, non-comm center evaluation guidelines and discussion about various trainee problems (troubleshooting and brainstorming).

With the three-week format I use, I leave the students at the end of each day with one take-home study assignment developed to help them review the day's material. The APCO instructor manual has a lot of resources you can also use for such activities.

LEARNING THE ROPES

4. Maintaining your CTO program. Obtaining approval from your agency director, getting your cadre of CTOs trained and having them successfully train your new crop of dispatcher trainees is an enviable goal. *The catch:* How will you evaluate the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) of the new CTOs? And every CTO will have their own interpretation of how to rate the KSAs of the trainees. Someone needs to be in charge of ensuring that the duties of the CTO are being discharged properly and that the required documentation is being completed correctly. This will take some time, and it will most likely fall on your training officer or manager or get added to a supervisor's task list.

Whatever the situation, it's vital to your agency that CTOs be held accountable to perform properly while they're making the trainee accountable for learning the job skills properly. Designate a person to be your CTO coordinator, and make them the point person for all of this information. They become the primary resource person for your CTOs, who may have questions on documentation, training techniques and problem solving issues.

Keep neat, individual files on each CTO as well as each trainee. In the CTO's file keep records on their training and certifications, hours they participated in training activities and any situations involving their personal performance as a CTO. In the trainee's file, keep everything from day one that you use to record performance and demeanor.

You'll also need to periodically review and revise the trainee task list items (I call it our "KSA checklist") and revise your standard evaluation guidelines and training policies as needed to fulfill your agency requirements. Doing this will ensure currency in your training program, which builds liability protection.

It is the daily upkeep of your program that will help it to be effective and meaningful and produce a quality end product: properly trained dispatch personnel.

SUMMARY

Whereas the dispatcher is the vital link in emergency communications, the CTO is a vital link in your training program. These individuals will be tasked with training your new-hires and seasoned personnel in various topics. They must possess the knowledge, skills, abilities and demeanor required of a dispatcher *and* be able to effectively convey to employees with various learning styles your agency's purpose, the employee's role, policies and procedures, and information on equipment and resources used at your agency.

It's important to properly develop your CTO program, train your CTOs and review and revise your program as necessary for your CTO program to be most effective. With the resources currently available through APCO and other training vendors, you don't have to reinvent the wheel. You can now customize a program to fit your agency's needs. ||PSC||

STEPHEN H. REICHMAN SR. has been involved in emergency services since the early 1980s. His public safety communications experience began in 1986 as a dispatcher trainee in Chester County, Pa. He currently serves as superintendent of training for Bucks County (Pa.) Emergency Communications. He has served as an adjunct instructor for APCO Institute Online and was a contributing editor for the APCO Communications Training Officer Training Program manual (4th edition).

1. A properly designed CTO program is necessary:
 - a. because it is required by federal law.
 - b. but is not an issue because agencies already conform to established standards.
 - c. to ensure your trainees are receiving the proper type and quantity of training.
 - d. increases your liability protection.
 - e. both C & D

2. The CTO is a vital link in your training program because it links the management aspects of training with your line personnel and trainees.
 - a. True
 - b. False

- 3-6. Match the goal on the left with the correct element to factor in on the right by drawing a line between them.

| | |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Get approval from your director. 4. Develop your program. 5. Conduct CTO training. 6. Maintain your CTO program. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Provides students with important locally applicable information. b. Reviews and revises CTO program elements. c. Authorizes the CTO program. d. Meets standards and defines minimum requirements. |
|--|---|

7. Selection of CTOs is important because:
 - a. the trainee will emulate their CTO.
 - b. today's CTO may be tomorrow's supervisor.
 - c. selection ensures those picked are positive role models.
 - d. all of the above

8. It is appropriate to designate a person to coordinate the CTO program because they are the primary resource person to clarify policy and answer CTO questions on documentation, training technique and help CTOs problem solve.
 - a. True
 - b. False

9. Our profession demands people who are _____ in/about the training process:
 - a. invested
 - b. nonchalant
 - c. hesitant
 - d. not involved

Using the CDE Articles for Credit

APCO Institute Continuing Dispatch Education

1. Study the CDE article in this issue.
2. Answer the test questions using this form. Photocopies are acceptable, but don't enlarge them.
3. Fill out the appropriate information section below and submit the form to:

APCO Institute
 351 N. Williamson Blvd.
 Daytona Beach, FL 32114

Questions? Call us at 888/APCO-9-1-1.

ORDERING INFORMATION:

If you are **APCO certified** and will be using the CDE tests for recertification, complete this section and return the form when you send in your request for recertification. **Do not send in the tests every month.** There is no cost for APCO-certified personnel to use the CDE article program.

APCO Instructor Certificate # _____

Expiration Date: _____

APCO EMD Basic Certificate # _____

Expiration Date: _____

If you are **not APCO certified** and would like to use the CDE tests for other certifications, fill out this section and send in the completed form with payment of \$15 for each test. You will receive an APCO certificate in the mail to verify test completion. (APCO instructors and EMD students please use section above also.)

Name: _____

Title: _____ Organization: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

E-mail: _____

I am certified by: MPC PowerPhone Other

If other, specify: _____

My check is enclosed, payable to APCO Institute for \$15. Use the attached purchase order for payment.